



headspace
National Youth Mental Health Foundation

Bullying



What is bullying?

Bullying is intentional and repeated negative behaviour directed towards another person by one or more people over time. It can be related to just about anything and can come in many forms. For example, bullying can include physical, verbal, social (like spreading rumours, excluding people, etc.) or sexual aggression, and it can be either online or face-to-face.



Cyber bullying is a form of bullying that uses technology (e.g. text messages, email and social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram or YouTube), anonymously or not, to carry out the behaviour.



46.8%

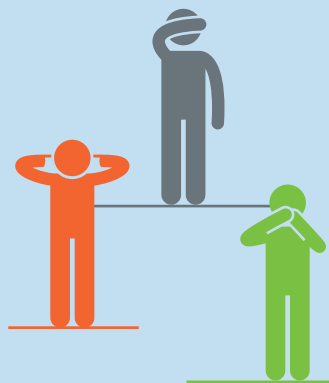
school students have been bullied

Bullying can take place just about anywhere. Some common places are schools, workplaces, home and online; basically any environment where people interact with each other. Bullying is also common, with up to 46.8% of Australian secondary school students reporting they have been bullied in some form over the past 12 months¹.

Who is a bully?

A bully can be an individual or a group of people. A bully is usually a person who does not value or feel good within themselves (has low self-esteem) or has been a victim of violence themselves. Bullying is often a way of making themselves feel more powerful or “look cool” in front of others. Bullies can also be motivated by jealousy, lack of knowledge, fear or misunderstanding.

A bully can be anyone, including friends, a boyfriend or girlfriend, brother or sister, or an extended family member. A bully can also be an older person, or someone in a position of power such as a teacher, parent or boss.



The bystander

Someone who sees or knows about bullying, but does nothing to stop it, is known as a bystander. A bystander plays a significant role in bullying.

If you find yourself in this position, try not to accidentally support the bully by standing by and doing nothing, laughing at the person being bullied,

or by “liking” nasty photos or posts online. It can help to tell the person being bullied that you are there for them, as they may be feeling very alone. If you see bullying and do not feel comfortable taking action yourself, report it to a trusted adult and let them know you want to be kept anonymous.

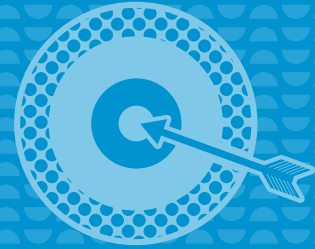
The effects of bullying

People who have been bullied may feel alone, unsafe, afraid, stressed, ashamed and rejected. Often they will feel that there is no escape and may take measures to ‘fit in’ by changing their appearance, acting differently, and may even go so far as to hurt themselves or others.

Bullying is not simply “part of growing up”. Research shows that being bullied can have serious effects on your physical and mental health, and your performance at school and at work which can affect you even into adulthood². Severe bullying can be traumatic for young people, especially peer bullying, as peer relationships are important at this stage of life. Experiencing bullying can also increase the risk that someone will develop depression and anxiety in the future.



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If you are being bullied

It's important to remember that if you are being bullied it is not your fault. There is nothing wrong with you; it is the result of someone else's behaviour, attitude or beliefs. Everyone is different; we are all individuals and you don't need to change who you are.

Dealing with these negative feelings can be hard and seeking help is one way to help you to overcome them. By identifying these feelings you may be able to find ways to get bullying to stop and get the feelings to stop.

Don't be afraid to let someone know that you are being bullied as soon as it starts happening, especially if you feel like it is having an effect on your mental health. Not saying something can make it hard for you to handle the problem on your own and can lead to more serious mental health issues in future.

Ways you can support a friend who is being bullied

► **Ask them about their situation.** Remember to be respectful and understanding. They may not necessarily feel like answering and that is okay.

► **Let them know they are not alone.** It may help them to know that a lot of other young people are going through what they are.

► **Provide reassurance.** Emphasise that the bullying is not their fault. Remind them that they are not responsible for what is happening to them and that they do not have to handle this on their own.

► **Make sure they are safe.** Sometimes this may require you to take action and speak up, even if they don't want you to. Speak with them if this might be the case.

► **Be prepared to seek help.** Help them decide how to approach the situation. Discuss who they could talk to about the situation, such as a trusted adult. If the bullying is at school, a trusted teacher is a good place to start.

► **Look out for their mental health.** Bullying can have a serious effect on someone's mental and physical health. If you feel like your friend is struggling because of bullying they may need professional support. Their local general practitioner (GP) or **headspace** centre is a good place to start.

Other useful websites

- Lifeline – www.lifeline.org.au
- Kids Help Line – www.kidshelp.com.au
- Bullying No Way – www.bullyingnoway.gov.au
- The Alannah and Madeline Foundation – www.amf.org.au/bullying
- Cybersmart – www.cybersmart.gov.au



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For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre or for online and telephone support, visit headspace.org.au

References: Hemphill, SA, Tollit, M, & Kotevski, A. (2012). Pastoral Care in Education, 30(2), 99-112. Arseneault, L, Bowes, L, & Shakoor, S. (2010). Bullying victimization in youths and mental health problems: 'Much ado about nothing?'. *Psychological Medicine*, 40(5), 717-729.

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